



REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

Honorable Mr. John Silk, Minister of Foreign Affairs
United Nations General Assembly
General Debate
New York 26 September 2011

check against delivery

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of President Jurelang Zedkaia, I bring you the warm greetings of Yokwe from the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

The Marshall Islands also welcomes South Sudan, the newest member of the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

The Marshall Islands congratulates the Secretary-General for making nuclear disarmament and nuclear safety a top priority for your second term at the United Nations.

Fifty-seven years ago, the United Nations held in its trust the Marshallese people, at the dawn of the Cold War. Our Marshallese leaders petitioned the United Nations to put a halt to the testing of nuclear weapons; the United Nations responded with UN Trusteeship Resolutions 1082 (passed in 1954) and 1493 (passed in 1956). Acting with assurances of our protection, the United Nations, and its Administering Authority, the United States, detonated 67 large-scale nuclear explosions in the Marshall Islands. For decades, Marshallese leaders have returned to the United Nations to speak of the continuing impacts – cancer, fear, and continued exile from our homelands – and of a science where goalposts are always moving.

Three weeks ago, the leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum, in their Communique, recognized not only the special responsibility by the United States of America, but also agreed to support the Marshall Islands at the United Nations, including in addressing the Secretary-General's report.

There is a clear responsibility of the United Nations to acknowledge and address the consequences of nuclear testing undertaken during its watch.

Last year the General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General report on the effects of atomic radiation in the Marshall Islands. This report represents the potential for the Marshall Islands, the United States, and the United Nations to take a very positive step forward in understanding our past, bringing closure to this sad chapter in our history, and to understand how the international community can assist us in addressing future remediation challenges. The involvement of the UN is key.

Sadly, I am concerned that the Secretary-General has, thus far, neglected this critical opportunity. The UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, which was invited to contribute to the Secretary-General's efforts to assemble this report, has termed the General Assembly's deliberate mandate to be – I quote - “not appropriate” and “an apparent error” in need of formal correction.

Mr. President,

This is not only insensitive, but reveals that perhaps the UN itself has yet to come to terms, or even to merely acknowledge, its decisions on nuclear safety taken sixty years ago. This negative approach could preclude efforts to bring to the attention of this body important scientific work that has been done in assessing the consequences of the nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands.

It is our hope that UN will have the courage and will to rise above the past and make a difference, rather than to allow itself to remain controlled by history, and make excuses. As I have said earlier, for decades, Marshallese leaders have returned to the UN to repeatedly speak of the legacy of the nuclear testing in our country. It is my hope that one day, a new generation of Marshallese leaders will come to this august body to speak no more of this sad legacy, but rather to proclaim that the work is done - that all is well.

Mr. President,

Nuclear testing impacts are not the only historical legacy from international actors in the Marshall Islands. Unexploded ordnance from World War II, and oil leakage, is a persistent issue with our outer island communities, and poses threats to our human security, public health and environmental safety. We welcome the attention of the Pacific Island Forum leaders and join the call for assistance from international bodies and development partners.

Mr. President,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands is not just a small island state – we are a large ocean nation. Together, the oceanscape of the Pacific Islands is an area covering over ten percent of the world's surface, and is four times the size of Europe. The way we manage our maritime space is therefore a central pillar in our basic development aspirations, and has significant implications for the health of global oceans.

International commitments to ensure sustainable fisheries and to visibly advance our development aspirations can no longer be paid mere lip service and then later ignored by our partners in regional processes, including the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. The Marshall Islands presently only sees a penny of benefit for every dollar of the market value of our Pacific Tuna. The conservation measures by the Parties to the Nauru Agreement, including the vessel day scheme and high seas closures, must be implemented by our partners, to

not only reduce pressure on overfished stocks, but also to ensure our rightful place as a full economic actor.

Twenty years ago, global leaders at Rio set forward a high international benchmark for sustainable development, crafting a range of strategies and commitments. Next year, the critical "Rio Plus 20" review must not only focus on moving towards a global "green economy", but it must also pay specific attention to a global "blue economy", which ensures specific, measureable and time-bound targets for ensuring the sustainability of the global oceans and its fish stocks, particularly in regions dotted by small island states like my own. Greater commitment is needed to utilize targeted global high seas closures and thus ensure sustainable fisheries, as we are already doing in the Pacific. The hour is past for vague rhetoric – leaders must respond with action rather than continued neglect for the world's oceans.

Mr. President,

The Marshall Islands warmly welcomed the visit this month by the Secretary-General to the Pacific region. The Secretary-General was able to see for himself the vulnerability and existential threat facing the low-lying island states – and he has now rightfully challenged world leaders to respond. What were once theoretical and distant risks are now on the verge of becoming our reality.

Mr President,

International climate negotiations are at serious risk of entering a phase of political stalemate. Negotiators have spent over two decades in complicated processes that have delivered very little in terms of practical action to mitigate the climate change problem. Often blocked by only a handful of countries, the international community is still unable to commit to emissions cuts and targets sufficient to ensure the survival of the Marshall Islands and other low-lying nations.

The Marshall Islands can wait no longer. We are now choosing creative paths to drive urgency into our broken negotiations, and pursue practical initiatives to address the threats and risks.

First, the Marshall Islands joins with the government of Mexico in urging the UNFCCC to consider the use of voting as a means of last resort.

Second, we joined with our PSIDS colleagues in July to push for the Security Council to recognize climate change now poses an incontrovertible threat to international peace and security. We reiterate our call for the Secretary-General to report on these threats. Petty arguments about forums and mandates cannot be allowed to prevail at the risk of our statehood. All organs of the UN must now be proactively engaged. We don't need sympathy. We need solutions and political innovation.

Third, the Marshall Islands is studying carefully options for clarifying the relevant international obligations related to climate change, and how it affects our statehood. Working with our close

neighbor, the Republic of Palau, we are committed to pursue requests for legal advisory opinions from international tribunals – to recognize international legal principles which address questions of our survival and security in the context of climate risks. We have also agreed to work with Palau – and other vulnerable and low-lying countries - to formulate and advance our own legally binding climate agreement.

We – the most vulnerable - must act when others lack the political will.

Mr. President,

As a significant global economic and global leader, Taiwan can make substantial contributions to the international community.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands welcomes increased dialogue on key cross-strait issues; this progress deserves recognition by the international community. Given the United Nations' primary purpose to maintain international peace, the world cannot afford to overlook Taiwan's strong efforts in promoting peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific, including in regards to climate change.

The 2009 invitation by the World Health Organization for Taiwan's observer participation has not only benefited global medical progress, including on non-communicable diseases, but also serves as an effective model for its wider participation in other key organizations. We urge the UN – and its member states – to consider this model and develop effective means for Taiwan's participation in specialized agencies, including UNFCCC and ICAO.

Mr. President,

The Security Council must transform itself into an effective and contemporary body. The Security Council should be restructured to accommodate those nations whose size, leadership and responsibility – in particular the G4 of Japan, Germany, India and Brazil – warrants a permanent presence in the Council. Further efforts should be made to ensure that Africa and small nations, including island states, have improved access and an amplified voice.

Mr. President,

The General Assembly witnessed a historic moment last week, in which, for the first time, our General Debate was initiated by a woman – President Rousseff of Brazil. The Marshall Islands welcomes the Secretary-General's renewed priority on addressing gender, including a strengthened UN-Women institution, particularly in the Pacific.

Mr. President,

The message is the same for nuclear weapons, global security and climate change – international law is not an empty promise.

Thank you and kommol tata.